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ABSTRACT

This brochure outlines the substance abuse policy for students at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM/Pennsylvania). Noted are the dangers of substance abuse during the stressful time of medical training and later for the doctor and clients during professional practice. The policy's five goals are briefly stated. Described next is the Student Assistance Board, its composition (three faculty and two students), responsibilities (recommending contact persons for each class who will serve as a confidential contact for students who wish to request assistance or report the impairment of another student), and role. The board's role for those who seek assistance for a substance abuse problem is described including advocacy, costs, and disciplinary measures. Also detailed is the board's role in the event that a student is reported by another for substance abuse. Next is a policy regarding records and reporting when a student refuses all assistance. A final section on detection of the impaired student treats actions which the Dean of the College may take (requiring a student to submit to psychological assessment or urine screening), measures taken when impairment is detected, and the possibility of suspension pending a hearing. (JB)

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY

Intent

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine recognizes the importance of assisting students in their development of a lifestyle free from the use of illegal substances and the abuse of alcohol. Substance abuse in the medical community is seen as a serious national problem. Beyond the obvious detrimental effects on health posed by substance abuse, such addictive behaviors also threaten the welfare of patients in the college's teaching facilities and can ultimately jeopardize the licensure of the graduate physician.

Medical education is a time of great stress, and occasionally a student may be unable to successfully adapt to these stresses and engages in potentially harmful coping mechanisms such as alcohol or drug abuse. The College Policy on Substance Abuse represents the intent of the college to enable students to resolve substance abuse problems by requesting and receiving compassionate, confidential professional assistance early in their medical careers.

Goals

1. To provide effective and compassionate assistance to the impaired student before irreversible harm is done to his/her health, educational process, eligibility for licensure, or ability to function as a competent physician.

2. To provide a means by which the impaired student may request and receive confidential professional assistance without stigma or penalty, and thereby encourage self-reporting and personal responsibility.

3. To enable the impaired student to confront his/her problem and, where feasible, receive effective therapy with minimal disruption of the student's education.

4. To protect patients and others from the harm that the impaired student may cause.

5. To establish a process which focuses on counseling and therapy as a front-line approach, before disciplinary action is necessary.

The Student Assistance Board

The Student Assistance Board (SAB) is a group composed of three faculty members and two student members. One faculty member is a member of the Department of Psychiatry. ***Members of the college administration do not participate in the SAB.*** The Board's purpose is to identify impaired students, determine if professional assistance is indicated, and to monitor compliance with a mutually agreed upon treatment program. The SAB conducts all inquiries and other business in strict confidence, and is seen, ideally, as the intake point for students who wish to request assistance.

The two student members of the SAB will be responsible for recommending other students who will serve as contact persons in their respective classes. Each PCOM class will have one contact person, who may also be a representative to the SAB. The role of the contact person is to serve as a confidential contact within the class for students who wish to request assistance of the SAB or to report an impairment of another student.

Seeking Assistance from the SAB–When a student voluntarily seeks help from the SAB, the board will assume an advocacy role, by working with the impaired student to establish a treatment and monitoring program. The board will present recovery plans to the Dean for approval and for granting special educational arrangements necessary to complete the plan. The student's name will be kept confidential by the SAB, and will only be disclosed to the Dean when educational leave must be approved.

The college will cover the full cost of assessments and half the cost of treatment. All reports from off-campus treatment services will be made directly and solely to the Psychiatry Department representative on the SAB.

Students who comply with and successfully complete their recovery plan will not be subject to disciplinary action, and no information regarding the impairment or rehabilitation will be recorded in the student's permanent record.

Reports by Concerned Individuals–Unfortunately, impaired students often will not voluntarily seek help. When an impairment is reported to the SAB by a concerned individual (classmate, faculty member, family member), the board will review the facts of the situation in a confidential and discreet manner to determine the accuracy of the information reported. If no action is indicated, all records of the inquiry will be destroyed. If a student wishes to take a toxicology test to disprove a report of impairment, the college will provide such testing at no cost to the student.

If intervention is indicated, the SAB will meet with the student to discuss the situation and will seek to establish a plan for further assessment, and (if indicated by assessment) a recovery plan. Assessment may include psychological interviewing and/or toxicology tests. If a student declines to accept the assessment/treatment plan, the student will be liable for disciplinary action if an impairment is detected at any point forward in his or her medical education.

Records and Reporting by the SAB–The SAB will report students' names to the Dean for disciplinary action only in cases where a student refuses assessment/treatment, or monitoring indicates that a student is non-compliant in his or her recovery program.

General Detection of the Impaired Student–The Dean of the College may require a student to submit to psychological assessment and/or a urine screening to detect alcohol abuse or the presence of illegal drugs, at his discretion, based on reasonable suspicion of an impairment. Such assessments and toxicology tests will be performed by OMCP medical professionals, with reports sent in confidence to the Dean, and at no cost to the student.

If such screening measures detect an impairment, the Dean may remand the matter to the SAB or to the Faculty Committee on Discipline. Such students who have previously declined an assessment and/or recovery plan offered by the SAB will automatically be remanded to the Faculty Committee on Discipline for dismissal proceedings, should an impairment be detected.

In accordance with the college disciplinary policy, any student suspected of the use, sale or distribution of illegal drugs, either on-campus or off-campus, or alcohol abuse may be immediately suspended from the academic program, pending a hearing before the Faculty Committee on Discipline.